BCS3 at the Joint Readiness Training Center

Despite perceptions that BCS3 can be more trouble than it is worth, two units demonstrated during their Joint Readiness Training Center rotations that it can be an effective tool.

By Major Terry Newman

To ensure that sustainment is synchronized with all of the warfighting functions and tied to the commander's intent, it is important for sustainers to have a common operational picture (COP) and to be able to provide predictive sustainment support. The Battle Command Sustainment Support System (BCS3) was developed to pull information from multiple sources and generate near-real-time reports that provide the COP that sustainers need.

Despite perceptions that BCS3 does not work, units that have recently trained at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) at Fort Polk, Louisiana, have demonstrated increased BCS3 proficiency. This BCS3 proficiency has led to improvements in sustainment reporting and the COP. Three factors that contribute to the rotational units' success with BCS3 at JRTC are operator training, the use of BCS3 in garrison, and expanded use of the system. If units continue to improve in these three areas, BCS3 will eventually be employed to its fullest potential and leaders will be better informed when making decisions involving sustainment operations.

Leader Emphasis on Training

During its JRTC rotation, the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 82d Airborne Division (1/82 BCT), demonstrated a high level of proficiency with BCS3, which allowed it to excel in sustainment management and reporting. The 1/82 BCT sustainers obtained their proficiency with the BCS3 Logistics Reporting Tool (LRT) while they prepared for their JRTC rotation.

In the months preceding their pre-JRTC rotation field training exercises at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, 35 Soldiers were trained to use BCS3. This training ensured that battalion and brigade S–4s and the 307th Brigade Support Battalion (BSB) support operations section had Soldiers who could effectively use the system. They also conducted rehearsals before each field training exercise to ensure that everyone understood the procedures and the reporting requirements for the exercise.

In the months preceding its JRTC rotation, the 4th BCT, 4th Infantry Division (4/4 BCT), implemented a comprehensive training program that allowed units to use BCS3 during numerous training exercises before their JRTC rotation. The 704th BSB's support operations section conducted training to ensure that everyone in the section could, at a minimum, use the BCS3 LRT to track commodity stockage levels.

Both the 1/82 BCT and the 4/4 BCT took full advantage of the refresher training that JRTC makes available to units when they arrive at Fort Polk. Field support representatives are assigned to Fort Polk to tailor training to meet the needs of each unit. The contrast between units that are trained on BCS3 and those that are not is evident during the first few days of a JRTC rotation, when units begin reporting their logistics statuses and sustainment planners begin forecasting requirements.

BCS3 in Garrison

One of the challenges units face with BCS3 is that operators lose proficiency with the system if they do not use it for an extended period between training exercises. To mitigate this problem, 1/82 BCT began using BCS3 in garrison. The 307th BSB's sustainment automation support management office technician ensured that all of the BCS3 systems in the BCT were operational and then built a tracked-item list on BCS3 with specific items of equipment on which units would provide status reports. Operators were required to log in to the system daily and update the status of the designated equipment. Although units do not generally use BCS3 to track commodities and equipment while in garrison, using BCS3 to generate maintenance status reports for vehicles and equipment ensured that the 1/82 BCT's BCS3 operators remained proficient.

Expanded Use of BCS3

Another key to success for 1/82 BCT and 4/4 BCT was their willingness to expand the use of BCS3 beyond that of the LRT and take advantage of the other capabilities the system has to offer. Both units had Soldiers in their support operations shops who could build graphic overlays that showed the supply status at different locations or

Captain Sam Clarke, left, and First Lieutenant Gordon Fenlason, officers in the 307th Brigade Support Battalion support operations shop, retrieve reports from BCS3 before a sustainment targeting meeting during a JRTC rotation.

the route status for planned tactical convoy operations.

These BCTs also used the "Transverse" application on BCS3 to allow sustainment planners to use text messages to communicate with battalion S–4s and forward support company commanders. This gave sustainment planners the ability to receive short real-time notifications, such as when convoys arrived, when commodities were issued or received, and when a unit had updated its logistics status on BCS3.

Another practice that both 4/4 BCT and 1/82 BCT expanded on was tailoring the tracked-item list to track commodities, such as water and bulk fuel, by location rather than unit. This technique was practical when two or more units were operating at the same forward operating base and supply points were combined. For future operations, 1/82 BCT plans to include personnel and class VIII (medical supplies) reporting on BCS3 to improve the COP for the S–1 and the surgeon in the BCT sustainment cell.

Some units have stated that not enough BCS3 systems are allocated to each BCT. Typically, the brigade has 10 systems: 1 in each of the 4 forward support companies, 2 in the BCT headquarters, and 4 in the BSB headquarters. Therefore, using the LRT for reporting is subject to human error. When a battalion has only one BCS3 computer, a forward support company Soldier has to receive reports from each of the companies in the battalion and manually enter the data into the LRT.

To remedy this, 1/82 BCT had its field support representative install the LRT program on a computer in each of the company command posts so that each company could update its own status. This eliminated the requirement for battalion S–4s to sort through emails and spreadsheets and provided real-time updates to the sustainment planners and leaders.

Sustainers are constantly struggling to find better ways to provide predictive, rather than reactive, support. BCS3 has the capability to provide the COP and track contents of tactical convoys. It also can greatly improve the sustainment targeting meeting.

To ensure that sustainers can get commodities from supply points to the user in the most efficient way possible, sustainers must continue to improve and expand their use of BCS3. Recent training rotations at JRTC indicate that leaders are continuing to endorse the use of BCS3 and are pushing to ensure that their units are proficient. The 1/82 BCT and 4/4 BCT have shown that having multiple trained operators who use BCS3 in garrison to remain proficient and who continue to expand their use of BCS3 are more successful during their training at JRTC.

For assistance in improving your unit's use of BCS3 before your JRTC rotation contact the Tapestry Solutions BCS3 field support representative, Jack Castilaw, at jcastilaw@tapestrysolutions.com.

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